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The Monthly Security Awareness Newsletter for Computer Users

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Background

The number of ways children today can go online and interact with others is staggering. New social media services pop up like weeds and there are an ever-increasing number of apps and games that connect online. In addition, many schools are migrating to services such as Google Drive and require work to be completed and submitted online. Kids are literally growing up "connected." While this has many benefits, these opportunities also come with risks. In this newsletter, we explore three areas of risk for kids and what you can do to help them stay safe.

Guest Editor

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The Risks

1. Conduct: When interacting in online communities or virtual worlds, kids can behave in ways they never would in the real world. The lack of a physical presence can create a powerful sense of anonymity, especially in children. They are often tempted to express themselves in ways that might hurt other kids, called cyberbullying or griefing. In addition, your children may become the victim of others who are deliberately mean or hurtful to them.

2. Contact: Children are now in almost constant communication with others, whether through texting, interacting in online communities or playing in virtual worlds. The lack of physical presence often causes them to forget that the individual on the other end may not be who they say they are or may not have their best interest in mind. Predators roam these digital streets, and they will use every tactic they can to build relationships with potential victims, often by posing as children themselves.

3. Content: There is no shortage of ways to capture and post video, sound, images or text-based messages online. The temptation for kids to "out-post" others and over-share information about themselves or their family members

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is very real, and they often do it without realizing the consequences. Children may also not realize the dangers of identity theft or malware infection when others ask them probing questions or ask them to take actions such as clicking on links. Lastly, we live in an age where there is no "undo" when things are posted online or shared with others. Kids may think Kik, Instagram, Snapchat and other posts are fleeting, but those posts can all come back to haunt them or other family members later in life.

The key to protecting children online is to educate them about the dangers they face and make sure that not only are you talking to them, but they are talking to you.

Educating Kids

The number one thing you can do to protect kids is to talk to them. Know what your kids are doing online and educate them about today's risks and what they should do to protect themselves.

1. Safety at Home: Even with great mobility, home is where safe, online behaviors start. The younger you start talking to them, and they to you, the better. Hold regular conversations about online safety issues, even going so far as to show them actual negative events that have taken place. If you don't know what your kids are doing, simply ask. Play the clueless parent and ask them to show you what the latest technologies are and how they use them. Kids love the idea of being the teacher and will open up. For example, perhaps they are on Instagram. Ask them to show you how Instagram works; have them set up an account for you and have you follow them. Not only are you now learning and monitoring what your kids are doing, you are making it that much easier for them to talk to you. In addition, ensure—to the extent that you can—all online activity takes place in central areas of the home and create time boundaries for usage. By having home computers in a central location, kids are far less likely to engage in dangerous behavior. Also, consider a central charging station for mobile devices, with the rule all mobile devices go there before kids go to bed at night.

2. Safety with Others: When children are away from home, they are at more risk. Help them understand that your cyber rules apply wherever they are and communicate your restrictions to whomever you trust with their care. If they have mobile devices, check usage patterns (time and bandwidth) to see if there are signs of them taking

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advantage of the inherently fewer restrictions there are when away from home. You won't be able to stop all of the infractions, but your caring words will come to mind whenever their mobile devices are about to wander.

3. Safety in Numbers: You are not alone in this cyber watch. You should engage other parents, guardians, siblings, teachers and friends to help keep an eye out for potentially harmful behavior. Try to have your community keep up with the kids and encourage them to have positive interactions with them when they see kids starting down a dangerous path.

Finally, when kids make mistakes, treat each one as an experience to learn from instead of engaging in an immediate disciplinary action. Explain "why" each time and remind them that you are only trying to protect them from the dangers they cannot yet see. Let them know they can come to you if and when they experience anything uncomfortable in an online interaction, perhaps even have them take a screenshot to share with you. Make sure they also feel comfortable approaching you when they realize they themselves have done something inappropriate. Keeping real-world communication open and active is the best way to help kids stay safe in today's digital world.

Protecting Kids Online

To learn more about protecting your kids online, be sure to check out our Protecting Your Kids security awareness video (http://www.securingthehuman.org/u/2uX) and RSA panel discussion (http://www.securingthehuman.org/u/3Tu).

Resources

Cyber Smart: http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Parents.aspx

OnGuard Online: http://www.onguardonline.gov/topics/protect-kids-online

Stay Safe Online: https://www.staysafeonline.org/stay-safe-online/for-parents/raising-digital-citizens

Securing Kids Panel:
http://www.rsaconference.com/media/into-the-woods-protecting-our-youth-from-the-wolves-of-cyberspace

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